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Position Statement on Route Five and the Peace Bridge

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Position Statement on Route Five and the Peace Bridge

Abstract

The Partnership for the Public Good rejects the Department of Transportation, the Public Bridge Authority, and the Federal Highway Administration's 'preferred alternatives', in favor of the community's preferred alternatives for Peace Bridge expansion and Route Five reconstruction. In the Route Five and Peace Bridge projects, Buffalo has within its reach two opportunities to reinvigorate our waterfront and create real wealth and opportunity for existing and future residents and visitors. Unfortunately, these opportunities are being squandered by antiquated agencies which do not have the community's best interest at stake.

Keywords

Buffalo, Environment, Transit, Report, PPG, PDF

Partnership for the Public Good

Position Statement on Route Five and the Peace Bridge

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In the Route Five and Peace Bridge projects, Buffalo has within its reach two opportunities to reinvigorate our waterfront and create real wealth and opportunity for existing and future residents and visitors. Unfortunately, these opportunities are being squandered by antiquated agencies which do not have the community's best interest at stake.

The agencies' current proposals for infrastructure and development do not realize the waterfront's potential to become a nexus of community revitalization, strengthen existing communities, and provide benefits to local residents in areas such as quality of life, environmental justice, and sustainable employment opportunities.

PPG supports the community's demand that NYDOT recall the request for proposals for the elevated Route Five plan and instead move to final design and implementation of the boulevard alternative. Similarly, PPG supports the community's demand that the Public Bridge Authority reexamine feasible alternatives to its current truck plaza proposal, which involves the destruction of scores of historic homes in a vibrant, viable neighborhood.

Efforts to develop Buffalo's waterfront have been plagued by political infighting, inter-agency conflicts, and delusions of grandeur for more than thirty years. However, this community can not afford a repeat of the mistakes made under the antiquated and failed methods of urban renewal and highway proliferation. Both of the agencies' preferred plans use too much land, create more pollution, thwart accessibility, and ignore public input.

The failures of the Department of Transportation, the Public Bridge Authority, and the Federal Highway Administration once again reveal the transportation policies that have had a continuous negative effect

The Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) is a new project of the Coalition for Economic Justice. PPG is a broad collaboration dedicated to revitalizing Buffalo. Over 30 organizations have endorsed the PPG's 2008 Platform. For more information, please visit <http://ppg-buffalo.wikispaces.com>.

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on our upstate regions. They have pulled a critical mass of investment away from our core towns and cities while increasing ongoing operating and infrastructure expense at all levels of government. These actions have shown that major changes are necessary to establish a completely new direction for state and local transportation policy that is efficient, environmentally conscious, and creates sustainability by adding value, not just traffic, to communities. The Department of Transportation, Public Bridge Authority, and Federal Highway Administration policy must no longer be fixated on increasing speeds and decreasing travel times but must reflect reinvestment in quality, multi-modal communities, pedestrian safety, and other smart transportation initiatives.

We continue to witness the ramifications of these ongoing failed highway policies: a sunken expressway that has torn apart a once stable community, tremendous asthma rates across the West Side, children who have never seen Lake Erie though they have lived their entire lives within walking distance of it, a nationally recognized park system decimated by networks of speeding traffic. These projects present a unique possibility to not only begin to reverse this damage, but to build a better community. However, this opportunity is on the verge of disappearing. Carrying forth the Authorities' plans as presented would turn our backs on our two most precious resources, and our two greatest opportunities for reviving our city: the good and committed people of this region and our unrivaled waterfront.

Cities across the country and around the globe are removing grade separated highways in favor of boulevards and parkland. From San Francisco's Embarcadero Freeway, to New York City's West Side Highway, to Milwaukee's Park East Freeway, to Seoul's Cheonggye freeway, and Paris' Pompidou Expressway, thriving cities are making sound decisions to create a higher quality of life and remain competitive at attracting investment. Each of these decisions had contributed to tremendous investment and tremendous public support. The same cannot be said for *any* project that has rebuilt or expanded a grade separated highway along water's edge.

We must learn from our region's own mistakes, as we must learn from the successes of others. By these standards, both plans are clearly bad for communities, bad for business, and bad for our future. As more information emerges about the Peace Bridge Plaza plan, the chorus of detractors continues to swell. The Route Five plan (also known as the Southtowns Connector) is likewise opposed by a diverse set of interests and sectors, both local and national, including: the Buffalo Common Council, the Baird Foundation, Buffalo First, the Buffalo Preservation Board, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, Business First, the Congress for a New Urbanism, the Elmwood Village Association, Greater Buffalo Building Owners & Managers Association, Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier, the League of Women Voters, the New Millennium Group, Partners for a Livable Western New York, the Preservation Coalition of Erie County, the Sierra Club, the Valley Community Association, the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo.

The Partnership for the Public Good supports sound, future-oriented decision making and infrastructure projects that strengthen existing communities, provide benefits to local residents in increased quality of life, environmental justice, and sustainable employment opportunities. For that reason the Partnership for the Public Good supports the Boulevard Alternative for the reconstruction of Route 5, and rejects the current Peace Bridge Expansion Plan. This position is included in the PPG's 2008 Platform which has been endorsed by over 30 organizations, including Catholic Charities, Belmont Shelter, Community Action, Citizen Action, and many others.

PPG calls upon all levels of Government, particularly Governor Elliot Spitzer, Mayor Byron Brown, and Congress Member Brian Higgins, who have each stood up to our multiplicity of outdated and antiquated agencies and authorities in the past, to display true leadership by stepping in to call for the Boulevard Alternative for the reconstructions of Route Five, and to reject the current Peace Bridge Expansion Plan.